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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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A-ONE #1253                                          12/31/10

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->From the Editor's Keyboard            "Saying it like it is!"
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We all here hope that you had a terrific Christmas holiday - plenty of
gifts from that man in the red suit, good food, and great celebrations
with family and friends.  As per the norm here, my wife and I went to
my in-laws for dinner, and exchanged gifts.  Good dinner, and lots of
terrific gifts.  While the "women-folk" chatted up a storm, I sat in the
living room, munching away and watching "A Christmas Story" for the
umpteenth time that day!  I still haven't had a chance to try out some of
the things I got this year, but I plan to over the next few days!

We had quite a blast of winter last weekend, but I don't think the storm
was as bad as forecast - at least in my neck of the woods.  While it was
true that we had to go out and clean up some snow quite a number of times;
but that was to try and keep ahead of the predicted snow amounts and make
sure that our three dogs had some reasonably clean room to roam about.
Especially the chihuahua, who would have been buried in snow had we not
cleared some space for her!  As I said, the snow amounts weren't near the
the two feet that was forecast, but the wind was as bad as predicted.
There is nothing worse than snow-blowing or shoveling snow and having the
wind whip it right back in your face!  Sure, you're thinking, blow/throw
it to the other side to avoid the "blow back"!  Doesn't help when the wind
is swirling in circles!  But, we finally got everything cleaned up - the
first real snow of the season now behind us, thankfully.

As it usually happens, this is probably the slowest week for news (well,
technology news anyway).  I'll be surprised if we manage to put together
a "full" issue this week, but we'll see what happens.  I'm guessing that
most of the articles this week will be more of a "general interest"
nature more than anything else.  But, I'm only guessing because like last
week, I'm trying to get a jump start on this week's issue because I'm
working New Year's Eve like I did last week on Christmas eve.

If I rattled a few cages last week with my comments about A-ONE's future,
I apologize.  But, it's something that had to be said.  A-ONE isn't a
business; we derive absolutely no income for what we do - it's purely an
endeavor conceived out of our passion for the Atari experience.  So,
since most businesses tend to fall by the wayside due to shrinking profits
and other "business-related" reasons, we're not concerned about the
"bottom line" figures - there aren't any!  Our decisions are pretty much
based on personal thoughts, some rationale, and who-knows-what-else that
could be happening at any given point in time.  Week after week, we've
simply been in a "just do it" mode with nary a thought of for how long.
It's simply something that hasn't really come up in the past - at least
beyond a few occasional silent and private thoughts in our heads.  It may

be time to start considering what the future holds for A-ONE.  In any case,
we'll still be appearing weekly for some time to come, so please don't
write our obituary just yet!

All of us here at A-ONE want to with you all a very Happy New Year!  We
hope that the new year brings you good health, success, and happiness.
Please celebrate and welcome in the new year responsibly - you can do it!

I also would like to thank those who continue to help me make the A-ONE
experience an enjoyable and successful one.  Joe Mirando and I have been
writing together for a long time - since our days with STReport, many
years ago.  And even before that, at various Atari shows on the east coast
(WAACE, the Connecticuts shows, and who remembers which others?!).  Without
Joe's continued support (and columns!), A-ONE would never have happened,
much less continued these past 12 years!  Thanks, Unka Joe!  And to Rob
Mahlert, who has done a lot of work supporting our web site and mailing
list (and tons of other stuff over the years!) - thanks, Rob!  And over the
years, we've had a number of our readers send us an occasional story idea
or articles to be considered for publication.  But one of our readers
continues to stand out with his contributions to the magazine, even if some
of the articles end up on the cutting room floor or not considered at all
(and that rarely happens!).  To our friend and loyal reader, Fred Horvat,
thanks for your interest and never-ending contributions to our humble
weekly offerings!  To friends and former contributors Albert Dayes, Mike
Burkeley, and TJ Andrews - even though your work no longer graces our
pages, I want to thank you all for what you contributed during our early
days.  For that, we'll always be grateful!  And last, but certainly just
as important as those folks mentioned above - thanks to all of you, our
readers - for making it all worthwhile in the first place!  Your similar
interests in "all things Atari" have helped to make it all enjoyable in
many ways!  Happy New Year to all!

Until next time...


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                      PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                    compiled by Joe Mirando
                      joe@atarinews.org



Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Yes, this is it; the last issue of the
year. It's been an interesting year, to say the least. Lots of changes,
lots of things getting better.

It's been tough on a lot of people in a lot of ways. And I may be an
eternal optimist, but I see ALL of that changing this coming year. No, not
for the Atari world. Nothing short of Mr. Peabody's Way-Back machine will
do that. Let's face it. Atari hasn't made a computer in how many years?
Many. Let's leave it at that. And while there are still a lot of us
hobbyists out there, it's getting ever-harder to do all the things we want
to do with our STs, Megas, TTs and Falcons. And the Jaguar? Well, that's
pretty much the same story. I mean, how many times can you play
DOOM or Ultra-Vortek? But since the machine isn't being made
anymore, neither are new games, and no new computers, no new software.

If you read Dana's editorial last week, you have some idea of what our mindset was when we envisioned A-ONE. We wanted (and still want) a publication that anyone could read on a computer. No WORD files, PDFs or any of the other things that left the ST behind. Just a simple text file that gave just about everyone the ability to read our humble offering.

We've resisted the temptation, countless times, to 'modernize'. Our sole concession was our website. And our buddy Rob Mahlert helped us out with the code to give us the ability to put each new issue up with a minimum of fuss. Thanks Rob.

But as Dana said, there's less and less Atari news out there, and we're at the point now where any LESS Atari news would put us into negative numbers. But we keep at it. Why? Darned if I know. All I can tell you is that, well, that it's what we do.

You see, the Atari world has always been a community to me. It's been less about the computers and more about the people. Yes, I love the hell out of my ST and TT. They were amazing, ground-breaking computers in their day. But their day has come and gone. And, as I've said before, the very thing that allowed Atari to make them such amazing computers for the price kept them from keeping that status. In order to give us the "Power Without the Price", they cut some corners. One megabyte machines were made to be just that: One megabyte machines. Video was designed to give you good color depth and resolution (for the time), but there was no easy way to change upgrade. Things were pretty much carved in stone.

Of course, there were those who ended up being 'stone cutters', blowing past those carved-in-stone limitations. The CodeHeads, FaSTech, Gribnif, Gadgets by Small... all brilliant people with brilliant products.

By comparison, I've always just been an enthusiastic... well, enthusiast. But the fact remains that I really REALLY enjoyed my ST. I've not had a computer before or since that had a personality. My ST did. The TT did also, but to a lesser extent. The ST was where I was most comfortable. It reached its height when I added NeoDesk and then Geneva. THAT was life in the fast lane back then. I could multi-task! THAT was something amazing back then. We take it for granted now, but back then it was sort of the holy grail. Or, one of them, anyway.

I can still remember getting home from work and firing up the ST. It was like saying hello to an old friend. You just don't get that with any other computer. Oh, I've heard a few Mac users say they feel that way about the old Mac OS, but I think they say it just because I did. [grin]

Ah, but those days are gone, and I doubt I'll ever seem them again. But as I said, it wasn't just the hardware and software that I felt was special back then; it was the people I met while cruising the online services like Delphi, CompuServe and GEnie. Some of them have become very good, very close friends that I still have contact with despite the fact that our favorite computers are no longer enjoying the popularity they once did.

So what does that mean for Dana and Joe, and for A-ONE? Good question. Dana said it right last week: It's something that we both know we'll have to discuss in the future. We just disagree on WHEN in the future. See, I say we should discuss it in the distant future, Dana says we should discuss it in the DISTANT distant future. [grin]

So in short, I think we can count on at least a bit more of A-ONE, at

least a bit more of my attitude, of Dana's information and news, and maybe
even a surprise or two here and there. No promises, but who knows what lay
ahead? No, I'm afraid, dear friends, that even the Shadow doesn't know.
But one can always hope, and that's what I'm doing.

But we must, at some point, face facts and get used to the idea that one
of these days there will not be a need, or at least a reason, for A-ONE.
Maybe it'll be because we've all had chips implanted in our brains that
turn us into sort of 'biological Kindles' so that we can connect to the
internet at will and download whatever we want to with a thought. And it's
that "with a thought" part that will keep many people from being able to
participate... Oddly enough, this is not a new idea. It's been fantasized
about for years.. decades. It's even got a name of sorts. While digital
code is known as software, and the actual devices with... physicality are
called hardware, there's also a name for things that sort of bridge the
gap between the two... firmware. And with machine/biologic interfacing,
it's know as 'wetware'. Clever, huh? Well, ok, you're right. it doesn't
have the pizazz of, say 'quark' or 'gluon', but it does kind of convey
what it's describing. A 'wet' interface.

What does that have to do with Atari computers or A-ONE magazine? Nothing.
It's just a little bit of rambling from my poor old, dried-out wetware.
[grin]

On another note, since this IS the last issue of the year, let me wish you
and yours a happy and healthy coming year. May we all find the joy we
want as well as the wisdom we need. You probably won't read this until
AFTER New Years Eve, but I hope you were responsible and stayed sober and
safe or, at least if not sober, that you were responsible and didn't
drive. Again, the life you save may be MINE! We need you back here next
year to help us carry on. 'Till then, keep your eye on the horizon, your
back to the wall, your shoulder to the wheel, your nose to the grindstone
and your feet on the straight and narrow... now try to do all that without
toppling over! Oh hell just tune in again next week, same time, same
station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...


PEOPLE ARE TALKING



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->In This Week's Gaming Section  - Atari: Dungeons & Dragons Daggerdale!
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""    Nintendo 3DS: Not for Kids!




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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News  -  The Latest Gaming News!
   """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Atari Announces Dungeons & Dragons Daggerdale


A new Dungeons & Dragons game will be coming to downloadable formats early
next year, Atari and Bedlam Games announced Thursday.

Titled Dungeons & Dragons Daggerdale, it pits players against the forces
of evil as they attempt to conquer the Dalelands. It looks to be an action
multiplayer title, though it's not clear how much in the way of RPG elements
it will  include.

This is the second D&D game to be announced this year, the other being the
revival of Neverwinter. The latter is also a multiplayer title being
developed in conjunction with Cryptic.

Daggerdale is currently being developed for XBLA, PSN and PC. Look for it
in spring 2011.


Nintendo 3DS: Not for Kids


If you plan on purchasing a Nintendo 3DS to pacify your toddler on long
car-trips, think again - Nintendo says the handheld console should not be
used by children under six.

Just a month before the debut of the Nintendo 3DS (at Nintendo's Jan. 19
press conference, not CES as was previously thought, Nintendo has released
a warning [JP] on its Japanese webiste about the anticipated device.

The most notable point Nintendo makes is that children under the age of
six should not use the 3D effect on a Nintendo 3DS device (however,
Nintendo does point out that there is 2D-conversion, so you can still
drop the extra cash for a 3DS instead of just buying a regular DS). The
reasoning behind this is that the 3DS delivers two different images, one
for each eye--and because children's vision is still developing, viewing
3D could negatively impact your kids' eyes.

This is not only a warning for the Nintendo 3DS, though - it's a warning
for 3D in general. All commercial 3D (movies, HDTVs, etc.) utilizes the
same trick as the Nintendo 3DS, giving viewers a different image for each
eye. So, it would logically follow that children under the age of six also
should not watch 3D movies or 3D HDTV.

The human eyes' ability to perceive depth in the real world is called
stereopsis, which is the process in visual perception that's not complete
until around six or seven. If stereopsis does not fully develop, children
will have a condition called strabismus, or "lazy eye," in which eyes
don't focus on the same object and depth perception is thus compromised.

Stereoscopic images - aka 3D images - appear to most people to be in 3D
because the eyes are being tricked into not focusing on the same object.
In other words, when you view images in 3D you are temporarily giving
yourself lazy eye.

Along with the "not for kids under six" warning, Nintendo also gives
some general notes--because 3D imagery is more likely to give you
eye-fatigue, Nintendo suggests a break after every 30 minutes (instead

of every hour). Also, Nintendo notes that the 3DS has an included 3D
slider for controlling the 3D-ness of the image (but also warns that
some people may not be able to see the 3D images at all, no matter how
hard they try).

Assuming you're not a child and not worried about lazy eye, GameStop is now
taking pre-order deposits for the Nintendo 3DS. The price hasn't yet been
announced, but it's suggested the handheld console will run for between
$250 and $300.


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Americans Don't Want the FCC to Regulate the Internet


A new survey from Rasmussen Reports reveals that just one in five
American voters want the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to
regulate the Internet, placing their faith instead in free market
competition to protect the Internet's U.S. users.

Rasmussen asked 1,000 likely U.S. voters, "Should the Federal
Communications Commission regulate the Internet like it does radio and
television?" Only 21% of those polled responded affirmatively, while a
whopping 54% stated that they opposed FCC regulation of the Internet.
One in four said they were not sure.

According to Rasmussen, the Republicans and independent voters surveyed,
"overwhelmingly opposed FCC regulation of the Internet," while Democrats
were more evenly divided on the issue.

When asked whether government regulation or free market competition was
a better mechanism to protect Internet users, 52% chose free market
competition, while only 27% said government regulation was the best
option. Again, Republicans and independents chose free market
competition by a wide margin, but a plurality of Democrats said
regulation was the answer (46%). Part of the reason for their choice was
because the majority of likely U.S. voters polled (56%) say the FCC
would use its authority to promote a political agenda, while only 28%
disagree with that assertion.

We're not surprised by the results of the Rasmussen poll, but here's one
reason why we believe they're opposed to FCC regulation:

"The issue has attracted little public notice. Just 20% are following
news of the net neutrality regulations Very Closely. Another 35% say
they're following it Somewhat Closely."

Net neutrality is a complicated subject filled with many factions and
lots of nuances that can only be found in the detailed government
paperwork the FCC and the courts have been generating for the last few

years. Last year, the FCC stepped in to mandate net neutrality for the web.

Internet activists cheered the move, but U.S. courts ruled that the FCC doesn't have the authority to make such mandates.

The FCC skirted around the issue by making Internet lines subject to the same rules as telephone networks, but work on net neutrality slowed down. Then Google and Verizon made its controversial open Internet document, which proposes that different rules should apply to wireless networks.

The FCC wasn't happy with Google and Verizon for essentially going over its head, but eventually the FCC approved an Open Internet Order that included many of Google and Verizon's proposed rules. Now the FCC's authority to regulate the web is being questioned by Congress and the issue could easily make its way back to court.

No wonder the vast majority of the American public aren't paying attention; how can anybody be expected to follow all of these developments when they have a work and family life to manage? It's a classic case of rational choice theory.

As we've written before, without net neutrality regulations, Internet service providers (ISPs) could have free reign to discriminate against the transmission of certain types of data, like video. Here are some of the potential worse case scenarios just to get started.

Excessive government regulation can stifle innovation, but a lack of intervention could turn the Internet into a wild west where Comcast, Verizon and other ISPs create fast tracks for some content while making it impossible for Internet users to access other websites. We need to find the right balance of net neutrality regulation that keeps the web open but doesn't restrict the impressive innovations that have contributed to the rise of Facebook, Google and thousands of web startups.


FBI in Hunt for Pro-WikiLeaks Hackers


The FBI has joined the hunt for hackers who took down websites like PayPal, after they stopped processing payments to whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks, US media reports said Friday.

The Smoking Gun website published five pages of an FBI affidavit, detailing an operation that took US federal investigators to Europe, Canada and back to the United States as they hunted down the "Internet activists" who launched attacks "against perceived corporate enemies of WikiLeaks."

The attacks earlier this month targeted firms including electronic payments site PayPal, and Visa and Mastercard credit cards, which had suspended or frozen WikiLeaks?s accounts after the whistle-blowing website published thousands of sensitive Department of State cables.

In mid-December, the FBI traced Internet protocol addresses for the hackers to Canada and then back to California where a virtual server that was assigned one of the IP addresses used to launch the attacks was housed.

At around the same time, a separate investigation into the pro-WikiLeaks attacks by Germany's Federal Criminal Police (BKA) found that other

commands to launch denial of service attacks on PayPal had come from an IP address assigned to a Texas-based company that hosts servers.

The FBI raided the Texas firm on December 16, according to the Smoking Gun, which uses Freedom of Information requests to obtain material from government and law enforcement sources.

During the Texas server-farm raid, FBI agents reportedly copied two hard drives inside a server, but "court records do not detail what was found on those drives, nor whether the information led to a suspect or, perhaps, a continuing electronic trail," the Smoking Gun says.

The FBI probes are ongoing, and are being coordinated from field offices in California.

FBI agents were not immediately available for comment.


## Paul Allen Refiles Suit Against Internet Giants

A company owned by billionaire Microsoft Corp. co-founder Paul Allen has refiled a patent infringement lawsuit against Facebook, Google Inc. and nine other companies.

Interval Licensing owns patents from technology developed by Allen's now-defunct research group in the 1990s. Interval says Facebook, Google, Apple, Netflix, Yahoo and others infringe on four patents.

Two claims involve the way websites suggest related content to what's being shown on-screen, such as movies or news stories the Web surfer might also enjoy.

The other two patents relate to the way computer programs and websites send alerts to the user without disturbing their main activity on the computer, unobtrusively and off to the side.

The original lawsuit was filed in August, but it was dismissed because it didn't cite specific examples of infringing products.


## Putin Orders Russian Move to GNU/Linux

[Via Google Translate: Prime Minister Vladimir Putin signed a plan for transition of power structures and the federal budget [to] free software. According to the document, the introduction of Linux in government should begin in II quarter 2012.

Today it became known that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin signed a document which describes the timetable for the transition of power structures on free software (OSS).

The document is called a "transition plan of the federal authorities and federal budgetary institutions on the use of free software, and covers the period from 2011 to 2015.]

The key document with that timetable (in Russian) is here; Google's

translation of the salient part:

    1. Approve the attached plan for the transition of federal executive
bodies and agencies of the federal budget for the use of free software for
2011 - 2015 years.

    2.Federal executive agencies to implement activities in accordance
with the plan approved by this Order, within the established government of
the Russian Federation, limiting the size of their staff and budget
allocations provided to them in the federal budget execution authority to
the specified area of activity.

The fact that Putin has signed the order for this project could be critical:
there have been several previous plans for moving parts of the Russian
government to using free software, notably in the educational sector, but
in practice they have mostly failed to materialise because there has been
insufficient political weight behind them. But if Putin says: "make it so",
I suspect that a lot of people will jump pretty fast to make sure that it
*is* so. And once that happens, other plans to roll out free software might
well suddenly look rather more attractive.


                    Facebook Tops Google as Most Visited Site in U.S.


Facebook surpassed Google for the first time as the most visited website
in the United States for most of 2010.

The social network site edged out Google.com with 8.9 percent of all U.S.
visits between January and November 2010, while Google.com ranked second
with about 7.2 percent of all visits, according to online measurement
service Experian Hitwise.

Facebook's move to the top spot shows just how quickly the site has grown
in popularity. Within the span of six years, Facebook has become the
world's largest Web social network with roughly half a billion users
worldwide.

Google.com dominated the top spot as the most visited website in the United
States in 2009 and 2008. News Corp's MySpace was the No. 1 visited website
in 2007. It is ranked No. 7.

However, when all of Google's properties are considered - such as
YouTube and email, for instance - Google still reigns as the most
visited site at 9.9 percent between January and November 2010. Facebook
follows at 8.9 percent. Yahoo and all of its properties ranked third at
8.1 percent.


                    Pew Study Hints at What Web Users Will Pay For


The Web may seem like the land of something for nothing. Free video. Free
news. Even free tools such as word processing and spreadsheets.

But almost two-thirds of adult Internet users in the U.S. have paid for
access to at least one of these intangible items online, according to a
new survey from the Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Whether people will pay for different types of material on the Web is among the most pressing questions facing media companies in the 21st century.

As people shift their attention to the Internet from more traditional ways of enjoying media, the companies that provide everything from movies to mystery novels want to make sure they can still get paid for what they do. The big TV networks want viewers to pay for full access to episodes of their favorite shows. Newspaper companies want readers to pay for news. Book publishers want higher prices for digital editions of new releases.

The new figures from Pew suggest paying for content online is at least not a completely foreign idea for most people.

About a third of respondents said they have paid for digital music. Same for software.

Behind that came mobile apps for cell phones or tablet computers at 21 percent. Then digital games at 19 percent and newspaper, magazine or journal articles at 18 percent.

The survey found that among people who paid for content, the typical user spent about $10 a month. However, there are some extremely high-end users, such that the average among those who have paid for content is about $47 a month. That includes subscriptions and individual files downloaded or accessed.

The survey of 755 Internet users in the U.S. was conducted Oct. 28-Nov. 1 and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.


                France Wants To Extend Private Copying Levy To Tablets...
                      But Not If They Run Microsoft Windows

from the say-what-now? department

Kurata points us to the news that French politicians are debating extending the "you must be a criminal" private copying levy to tablet computers - but, oddly, the new levy would not apply to tablets running Windows (Google translation from the original French). The tax would apply to any iPad or Android-based device, but apparently Windows tablets won't be counted, since they'll be classified as full computers, while the other tablets are in this new taxable category. Not surprisingly, this has some companies up in arms, with the French-based Archos particularly steamed, since it's producing Android-based tablets, and doesn't like the fact that its government seems to be giving preferential treatment to an American company.


                    Man Quits Job, Makes Living Suing E-mail Spammers


Daniel Balsam hates spam. Most everybody does, of course. But he has acted on his hate as few have, going far beyond simply hitting the delete button. He sues them.

Eight years ago, Balsam was working as a marketer when he received one
too many e-mail pitches to enlarge his breasts.

Enraged, he launched a Web site called Danhatesspam.com, quit a career
in marketing to go to law school and is making a decent living suing
companies who flood his e-mail inboxes with offers of cheap drugs, free
sex and unbelievable vacations.

"I feel like I'm doing a little bit of good cleaning up the Internet,"
Balsam said.

From San Francisco Superior Court small claims court to the 9th U.S.
Circuit Court of Appeals, Balsam, based in San Francisco, has filed many
lawsuits, including dozens before he graduated law school in 2008,
against e-mail marketers he says violate anti-spamming laws.

His many victories are mere rain drops in the ocean considering that
Cisco Systems Inc. estimates that there are 200 billion spam messages
circulating a day, accounting for 90 percent of all e-mail.

Still, Balsam settles enough lawsuits and collects enough from judgments
to make a living. He has racked up well in excess of $1 million in court
judgments and lawsuit settlements with companies accused of sending
illegal spam.

His courtroom foes contend that Balsam is one of many sole practitioners
unfairly exploiting anti-spam sentiments and laws. They accuse him of
filing lawsuits against out-of-state companies that would rather pay a
small settlement than expend the resources to fight the legal claims.

"He really seems to be trying to twist things for a buck," said Bennet
Kelley, a defense lawyer who has become Balsam's arch nemesis over the
years in the rough-and-tumble litigation niche that has sprung up around
spam.

Kelley created a website with a similar name, Danhatesspam.com, that was
critical of Balsam's tactics. Kelley let it expire.

"There is nothing wrong per se with being an anti-spam crusader," said
Kelley, who has sued Balsam twice for allegedly violating
confidentiality terms in settlement agreements. "But Dan abuses the
processes by using small claims court.

"A lot of people will settle with him to avoid the hassle," Kelley said.

Balsam started small in 2002 in small claims court. By 2008, some of his
cases were appearing before the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeal and he
was graduating from the University of California Hastings College of the
Law.

"What started just as kicks turned into a hobby, which turned into a
career," Balsam said. "It's what triggered me to go to law school."

Balsam mostly sues companies he accuses of violating California's
anti-spam law.

Among other restrictions, the law prohibits companies from sending spam
with headers that misleads the recipient into believing the e-mail is
noncommercial or comes with offers of "free" products that aren't true.

The law also requires a way for Internet consumers to "opt out" of receiving any more spam from a sender.

Balsam said he has more than 40 small claims victories and several more in higher courts, mostly alleging the receipt of misleading advertising.

In November, he won a $4,000 judgment against Various Inc., an "adult-oriented" social media company that controls AdultFriendFinder.com.

A judge sided with Balsam, who sued after he received four identical e-mails sent to four different accounts with the identical subject line "Hello my name is Rebecca, I love you." It's the fourth time he's beat Various in court.

The company is appealing the latest ruling and a hearing is scheduled for Jan. 5 in San Francisco Superior Court.

Balsam certainly isn't the average Internet consumer.

When San Mateo Superior Court Judge Marie Weiner in March ordered Trancos Inc. to pay Balsam $7,000 for sending spam that recipients couldn't stop, she noted that he has more than 100 e-mail addresses.

Balsam has filed lawsuits and got settlements and judgments from companies small and large.

He has sued the Stockton Asparagus Festival and embroiled himself in contentious litigation with Tagged.com, the country's third largest social networking site. Balsam noted in his lawsuit that Time magazine dubbed it "the world's most annoying Web site."

Tagged.com shot back with a lawsuit of its own, accusing Balsam of threatening to violate terms of an earlier settlement by telling the company he was planning to post terms of the agreement on his website.

Balsam is fighting the lawsuit and a lawyer for Tagged.com didn't return a phone call seeking comment.

Balsam has also been sued by Valueclick Inc. for allegedly breaching settlement agreements by exposing confidential terms, which he denies.

"Balsam, who in his anti-spam zeal frequently views matters in absolutes such that anyone who disagrees with him must be villainous," lawyers for Valueclick Inc. stated in a 2007 lawsuit accusing Balsam of disclosing terms of a settlement.

The lawsuit was later dismissed in San Francisco Superior Court and Balsam declined to discuss the case other than to say it was "resolved."

He said, generally speaking, those who sue him are "retaliating" for lawsuits he filed against them.

"I feel comfortable doing what I'm doing," Balsam said of the lawsuits against him. "And I'm not going away."


Bad Gifts May Be History with Amazon's Idea

For some, it's the red reindeer Christmas sweater. For others, it's the diamond-encrusted dreidel. Whatever your worst gift nightmare might be, Amazon may soon give you a reason to cheer.

The online retail behemoth that's the source of many presents - may they be good, bad or ugly - has patented a system that would let people exchange unwanted gifts for those they actually want. They could do this before they actually receive the gift.

Seattle-based Amazon.com Inc. recently patented a "system and method for converting gifts" on its website. It took nearly five years; the company had applied in March of 2006.

For now, though, it's just a patent. So until Amazon figures out how to implement it, you may be stuck with that itchy sweater.


## Michigan Man Faces Charges for Reading Wife's E-mail


A Rochester Hills man who says he learned of his wife's affair by reading her e-mail on their computer faces trial Feb. 7 on felony computer misuse charges.

Thirty-three-year-old Leon Walker used his wife's password to get into her Gmail account. Clara Walker filed for a divorce, which was granted this month.

Leon Walker tells The Oakland Press of Pontiac he was trying to protect the couple's children from neglect and calls the case a "miscarriage of justice."

Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Sydney Turner says the charge is justified.

Privacy law writer Frederick Lane tells the Detroit Free Press the law typically is used to prosecute identity theft and stealing trade secrets. He says he questions if a wife can expect privacy on a computer she shares with her husband.


## Canada Is Most Web-Addicted Nation


Maybe it's all those Justin Bieber fans: Canadians log more time on the Web and social media, including Facebook and YouTube, than any other nation.

The measurement company comScore reported Canada has the highest penetration of Internet access, with around 68% of Canadians routinely surfing online, against 62% in France and Britain. Close behind is 60% of Germans going online and, south of the border, 59% of Americans.

The laggards are Italians, where only 36% of the population goes online, according to comScore.

Web-addicted Canadians now spend an average 42 hours a month surfing the Web, up from 40 hours in 2009, and view an average 147 videos a month on

YouTube and other online video websites.

And around 17 million Canadians, or 51% of the population, have Facebook accounts. Canada has a vibrant Twitterverse, with an estimated 5% of the traffic routinely following the world domination of homegrown pop idol Justin Bieber.

Despite Canada's broadband connectivity, Canadians still lag Americans in their embrace of so-called "smart TV." Netflix is only a recent entrant into the Canadian market, while Google TV and Apple TV have yet to break through north of the border.

The delay is due in part to the country's TV watchdog debating whether to regulate the Internet as major cable and phone carriers steadily buy up major TV networks - Shaw Communications purchasing Canwest Global Communications Corp., Rogers Communications picking up Citytv and Bell Canada acquiring CTV - to offer TV to Canadians across multiple digital platforms before American behemoths establish themselves here.


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